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ABSTRACT

It is clear that more courses are being offered online each year. With the increase in the number of courses offered, the number of faculty teaching at a distance will also be increasing. Many researchers are discussing concerns that faculty have about online courses, such as incentives, training, technical support, workload, and intellectual property. Yet an additional area of concern may be holding many faculty back. The thought of transferring their teaching style to an online environment may be impossible for some faculty to imagine. The panel discussion in this paper involves four faculty members who currently teach online in various subjects. Each presents information on his/her teaching style, both classroom based and online, and discusses any differences in assignments and assessment. (Author)

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Portraying Yourself Online: A Discussion of Teaching Styles in Online Courses

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Abstract: It is clear that more courses are being offered online each year. With the increase in the number of courses offered, the number of faculty teaching at a distance will also be increasing. Many researchers are discussing concerns that faculty have about online courses, such as incentives, training, technical support, workload, and intellectual property. Yet an additional area of concern may be holding many faculty back. The thought of transferring their teaching style to an online environment may be impossible for some faculty to imagine. This panel discussion will involve four faculty members who currently teach online in various subjects. Each will present information on his/her teaching style, both classroom based and online, and discuss any differences in assignments and assessment.

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It is clear that an increasing number of institutions have begun offering distance learning. Among public 4-year institutions, 79 percent reported offering distance education courses in 1997-98, and an additional 12 percent planned to offer such courses within the next 3 years (NCES, 1997). Total enrollment in distance education courses across all postsecondary degree-granting institutions approximately doubled from 1995 to 1997-98, from 754,000 to 1.6 million (NCES, 1999). Institutions cite various reasons for offering distance education courses delivered through the Internet or other audio/video media (interactive or one-way). Among the goals are increasing students' access, increasing enrollments, increasing the institution's access to new audiences, and improving the quality of course offerings (NCES, 1999). In fall 1998, 6 percent of full- and part-time instructional faculty and staff at degree-granting institutions indicated that they taught at least one class or section through a distance education program; however with the increase in courses offered, the number of faculty teaching at a distance will also be increasing.

Many researchers are discussing concerns that faculty have about online courses, such as incentives, training, technical support, workload, and intellectual property. Yet an additional area of concern may be holding many faculty back. The thought of transferring their teaching style to an online environment may be impossible for some faculty to imagine. Grasha (1994) defines teaching style as a "pattern of needs, beliefs and behaviors that faculty display in their classroom". A faculty member's style affects how information is displayed, how student interaction occurs, how classroom tasks are carried out, and how assessment occurs. For instance, a faculty member who categorizes herself as an "Expert" believes that she possesses knowledge and expertise that the students need. Her main concern is with transmitting information and ensuring that students are well prepared (Grasha, 1994). The eighty-three percent of faculty who recently reported using lecture as their primary instructional method (NCES, 2001) would probably fall into this category. In contrast, a faculty member who considers himself to be a "Personal Model" oversees, guides, and directs students by showing how to do things and encouraging students to observe, and then emulate, the instructor's approach (Grasha, 1994). Is one teaching style more appropriate for online learning or should each faculty member be encouraged to express his/her own teaching/learning philosophy online?

This panel discussion will involve four faculty members who currently teach online in various subjects. Each will present information on his/her teaching style, both classroom based and online, discuss any differences in assignments and assessment, and present ideas of how they came to have that teaching style.

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The discussion will then be opened to the audience to address a number of controversial issues in e-learning in higher education:

- Do faculty members need to change their teaching style when moving to an online classroom?
- How difficult would it be and who would decide what the "correct" online teaching style would be?
- Do the accrediting agencies have a right to dictate how online class interaction occurs?
- Is the academic freedom that a professor exercises in the classroom being jeopardized by the move to an online classroom where the content can be more readily reviewed?

Dr. Colaric's Position statement: I believe that knowledge is built by an individual, is internal to the individual, and is influenced by the culture in which the individual learns. The role of the teacher is to guide learners as they construct their knowledge by providing resources, and challenging students to build an integrated understanding of the material. My goal is to provide a learning environment, either face-to-face or online, in which students are comfortable participating in discussion and where they feel responsible for both their own, and their classmates', learning.

My face-to-face and online courses are fairly similar. Both rely on the assumption that students will obtain basic content information independently and the role of the class is to have students define, describe, and modify that information until it becomes knowledge. So preparation through reading is key and class time is for discussion. I don't consider myself to be a content expert but a facilitator whose role it is to design activities, social interactions, or problem-solving situations that allow students to practice the processes for applying course content. This isn't an easy process! Many, if not most, students are used to reading textbooks and listening to lectures and then recalling what is often disconnected and discrete bits of information. Many students are confused by my classes for the first few weeks. They aren't used to their opinion and experiences "counting" as knowledge and are waiting for me to tell them what to do. In a face-to-face class it isn't unusual for me to announce that I don't answer my own questions and then we wait through long periods of silence until some brave soul speaks up.

In online classes I've developed a number of strategies that assist me in moving students to this student-centered environment. I make very clear that class participation is an integral part of the course grade and provide them with guidelines of exactly what they need to do to earn participation "points". I start the class with an introduction dialogue that introduces the students to each other in order to build a learning community where students come to know each other. All students move through the class at the same pace based on two-week modules; this definitely isn't a self-paced course. And I model appropriate communication strategies throughout the course.

Dr. Jones' Position statement: I believe that content is the most important consideration for a course and that the majority of my time as a teacher should be involved in making sure that it is relevant. I realize all too well that I depend on my technologically savvy colleagues for help in getting the content online. I'm still amazed at the mysterious ftp process and the capabilities of servers to store and distributed the information I create.

My philosophy of teaching students is based on the assumption that students in my classes are true beginners. I assume that they know nothing or very little of the content to be presented. I believe that all students are individuals and I try to take into consideration that their approaches may be vastly different from my own. I try to give my students practical knowledge that can be used as the building blocks to add to the lifelong process of building upon prior knowledge.

My courses are self-paced totally. Students have a deadline when everything must be completed. I am available online through a conference center as well as via e-mail, telephone, and fax to coach them through their assignments and amplify what they are introduced to in their online class materials. I hold physical as well as virtual office hours.

The assignments for all of my classes require the students to apply what they are learning to their own situations. I feel that students need and often do not have hands-on experience. The assignments allow them to get involved in real life situations where the information they are learning can be applied toward solving problems in various library settings. As a confirmed pragmatist, I design my students' assignments to be practical in nature. I want what I present my students, either online or face-to-face, to be applicable to their particular library settings.

I love to teach and see the advantages of teaching students who have busy schedules and lives outside my courses and live in remote areas not readily accessible to ECU's campus. I see online teaching as a means of removing barriers and making the formerly impossible now not only possible, but also readily accessible via the Internet.

Dr. Kester's Position statement: Some have called me a pioneer in moving from face to face teaching to totally online teaching. The content of the first course I delivered over the Internet was an introductory course about the Internet. What better way for students to learn the content than to experience it first hand. That first year, I held a two-hour hands on session to be sure students understood the terms. These terms included telnet and gopher. The students found it difficult to move from the well-equipped computers of the university lab to their own personal computers with dial-up access. That was the last time I held such a preliminary session for a class.

My students have always been non-traditional adults in graduate courses. Knowing the difficulties of juggling work, home, and school, I began each class with a global overview of the expectations of the semester. Assignment deadlines were flexible, except for student presentation dates. I use the same teaching style online, with some modifications. I use general deadlines that are meant to help students move through the course and not get behind. Units cover two to four weeks, providing flexibility during that time.

Over the past six years I have developed eleven different courses for online delivery. Gradually, most of these courses have been turned over to new faculty members, giving them a model to use during their first year of teaching online with the opportunity to revise to suit their own teaching style. Our students live in rural areas with slow Internet service; therefore, I have kept the design of the courses simple - no frames, few graphics, no streaming video. For our audience this has lessened the technology anxieties and allowed students to concentrate on the content. My instructional strategies include pairing, small groups, threaded discussions, and some synchronous chat. Assignments are designed for performance based assessment. Field visits to schools and libraries to gather information are followed by reflection on what was observed. Projects are designed to allow students to prepare for their future (and sometimes current) work setting.

When teaching face to face, I knew each student by sight, but could not always recall their name. Teaching online, I know students by their personalities, their email tags, and their style of writing in our "15 minute break" discussion threads. It is always a thrill to finally meet students at conferences or even on graduation day.

Dr. Steinweg's Position statement: My first experience with online instruction was exciting, frustrating, and arduous! Everyday there was a new challenge. I found that the students were hampered in accessing the content by their lack of technology skills. It seemed that I spent a great deal of time dealing with technology issues. The very structured, content-focused nature of the course design left me feeling that I was keeping records. I couldn't seem to get beyond the mechanics and in some way interact with the students. I felt like I was the grader in a self-paced, programmed instruction manual. Getting the content across was important, but I wanted a way to "talk" with the students.

I was fortunate to be asked to teach two sections of this same online class in the Fall semester. I took the course that had been designed and tried to tweak it to make it fit my style. I wanted to be able to interact with the students. I wanted them to interact with each other. I felt that we all had information and experiences that could add to the understanding of the content.

Teaching style is probably what I am really trying to say. In a face-to-face class, I like to have a lot of classroom interaction. I don't feel comfortable with the role of "dispenser of knowledge". I do feel that it is important that the factual information is presented, but I feel that the students can obtain a lot of that from the text. What I want to do is to get them to apply the facts to real world situations in which they are working. I also want them to see that there isn't always one right way or answer.

Because my topic is about exceptional children, I feel it is important for the students in my class to actually see children who are exceptional learners and to understand that we are talking about people, not just numbers. In my face-to-face classes, I usually use video clips to generate some discussion. I often invite practitioners in the field to come and share information about their work with exceptional learners. Students are required to give group presentations on a topic they have researched.

Trying to transfer some of this into my online class was a challenge. Because our university serves a large rural part of the state, many individuals are accessing the course through modems at home and video can be a problem. This also has an impact on the use of synchronous chats. Fall semester I changed a few things, but I still didn't feel comfortable. Students were beginning to interact minimally on the Discussion Board. But I still had this feeling of isolation in the course.

This semester I am teaching two online sections of the same introductory class and one section of another graduate level special education course that is taken primarily by students seeking a MAT. Another instructor had designed this course and I was teaching it the way that it had been designed. I decided to sign-up for an online class in strategies for online instruction. Teaching two online classes designed by two different people and taking an online class afforded me the opportunity to observe lots of different techniques, some of which addressed the things for which I had been looking.

I learned some ideas to generate conversation and to have students do online presentations. I began to see the interaction among students, and to even see them supporting each other. Rather than having students send all of their assignments to me, I started having them post their work on the discussion board so that classmates could ask questions and offer comments. I started using case studies to get the students to think about real situations with exceptional learners.

I will have to add that I have begun to think that I like teaching online better than face-to-face due to the time it allows for reflection and the multiple opportunities to view the information. In a face-to face class, the conversation is here for a second and then it is gone. Even notes do not completely record what happened. In an online class, the conversation and other information is there to be accessed repeatedly. The student or instructor can view the conversation, think about it, and then respond. This seems to generate higher level thinking.

What I am beginning to see is that I don't have to change my style to teach online. I just have to explore and find ways to use technology that allow me to do what I want to do. My technology skills are limited, but I am learning fast. Observing what other teachers have done online really helps. I can be just as supportive and encouraging online as I can be face-to-face. Trying new things is scary and exhilarating!

References:

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Panel Presentation

Application Domain: All
Technology: Many are relevant to this issue.
Strategic Focus: Many are relevant to this issue.

Presentation Title: eDropouts: Reducing Attrition in Online Learning

Presentation Description

Instead of, "If we build it will they come?" maybe we should be asking, "If they come will they stay?" The dropout rate in distance learning is generally reported to be higher than that for traditional classroom based learning. Those engaged in online distance learning must grapple with the problem of online learning dropouts. We need to identify innovative approaches and technologies that directly address the causes of attrition.

The reasons dropouts give for discontinuing distance learning are many. Common reasons include:

- Lack of prerequisites (academic preparation)
- Personal or domestic reasons
- Insufficient time available for study
- Job related issues
- Financial issues
- Care of children and or other domestic demands
- Change of plans
- The nature of the courses offered or the teaching methods
- Lack of academic counselling and support
- Isolation (loneliness and lack of interaction)
- Illness
- Unsatisfactory leaning or study conditions
- Lack of motivation and lack of confidence

Many educators and corporate trainers have offered suggestions for reducing attrition in online distance learning. Some of these suggestions include:

- Improved learner preparation
- Time management
- Learner goal setting and self assessment
- Increased interaction (discussion forums, chats, simulations, etc.)
- Mentoring and support
- Hybrid models (mix of face-to-face and online communication)
- Improved content quality

I propose to host a panel of three or four online educators and/or corporate trainers to examine the reasons learners give for dropping out and to explore innovative methods and technologies that may reduce attrition.

Ready to Roll: Go to Market Smarter

Abstract:
Product shelf-life keeps getting shorter with constant upgrades and new releases rapidly replacing the previous generation. The speed-to-market marching order can only work if everyone across the organization is up to date on the latest product offering. That means getting new product knowledge to the right people right away, from marketing to sales to support staff, to maintain the competitive advantage of rapid product life cycle.

In this panel presentation, Ara Ohanian and representatives from Black and Decker, Toyota and The Hartford will examine how product education can be shaped as a marketing weapon that can sharpen competitive edge, increase sales and build customer loyalty. They will discuss how companies can extend the reach of proprietary business intelligence to create a smarter sales force, and thus quicken market penetration. Citing the importance of training beyond product functionality, the speakers will describe how companies can keep personnel up to speed on current value propositions, market positioning against competitors, and sales strategies. The speakers will discuss how Vuepoint deployed educational tools to maximize knowledge acquisition and management across the organization to achieve speed-to-market sales objectives and product support readiness.

Attendees will learn:

- Critical role of education for product roll-outs
- How compressed speed to product knowledge can generate more sales and increase revenues
- How to rapidly ready the organization for new product roll out and upgrades
- How formal policies and practices for creating, capturing, and sharing proprietary knowledge can help build and reinforce brand awareness and identity

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Speaker bio:
Ara Ohanian brings more than 10 years of international corporate training, and knowledge transfer experience to his position as CEO and Founder of Vuepoint Corporation. Prior to founding Vuepoint, Ohanian founded management programs with the late Nobel Laureate Dr. W. Leontief to provide just-in-time training to over 2,500 international executives in more than 10 countries. He also established and ran a successful series of entrepreneurship programs to train citizens of the former Soviet Union for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under a contract from Deloitte & Touche.

Ohanian also has extensive sales and marketing experience that began with his position at NCR corporation where he ranked #1 in overall sales for the organization. In addition, he worked in advertising and marketing for Amacon, a UK based company representing brands such as Kellogg and Clorox.

Ohanian received a BA from the City University of New York as well as a French Baccalaureate from the Universite de Lille. He is conversant in more than 5 languages including French, Armenian, Spanish and Russian. A member of the Learning Content Management System (LCMS) Vendor Council, Ohanian also co-founded the eLITE (Electronic Learning Incites Teaching Excellence) Think Tank, an independent educational and research organization dedicated to advancing knowledge and thought leadership in eLearning.

Recent speaking engagements include: Human Resources Technology Conference and Expo, eLearning Executive Leadership Conference, Online Learning Conference and Expo, and Training Director's Forum.

Recent articles about Ara Ohanian:
Ohanian was quoted in the May 2002 issue of CFO Magazine in an article entitled "Web Learning Still a Class Struggle,"which describes how Toyota implemented Vuepoint's eLearning software as an effective management tool to increase productivity, and sharpen competitive advantage with faster speed to market for new products and services
<http://www.parsintl.com/pdf/4539-CFO.pdf>

Ohanian was the subject of an interview with CEOCast.com:
<http://www.vuepoint.com/news/ceocastInterview01.pdf>

July 2001 Training Magazine article:
<http://www.vuepoint.com/news/knowledge_race.pdf>

August 2001 EdVentures.com article:
<http://www.vuepoint.com/news/eduventures0801.pdf>

In August, 20021, Ohanian was nominated for SmartExecutive's eLearning Executive of the Year Award alongside renowned CEOs including Jack Welch of General Electric, John Chambers of Cisco Systems, Larry Ellison of Oracle, and Bill Gates of Microsoft.

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